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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2004

Agenda and programme of work for 2004

The agenda for the substantive session of 2004 of the Committee on Conferences was approved by the Committee at its organizational session, on 25 March 2004, on the basis of a draft agenda proposed by the Secretariat in document A/AC.172/2004/L.1. The approved agenda for the substantive session of 2004 is accordingly issued in the present document, together with annotations regarding the documentation, for the Committee's consideration in 2004. The reporting on most items on the agenda will be included in two comprehensive reports, one on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the other containing statistical and analytical information on various subjects under the agenda item entitled "Pattern of conferences".

Agenda for the substantive session of 2004

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Calendar of conferences and meetings:
   - (a) Intersessional departures for 2004 and related matters;
   - (b) Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2005;
   - (c) Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities:
     - (i) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with and/or concerning utilization of the conference services available to them;
     - (ii) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;
     - (iii) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;
     - (iv) Improving the performance of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management;

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(d) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243.

3. Documentation and publication-related matters:

(a) Submission, availability and distribution of documentation;

(b) Compliance with page limits.

4. Translation and interpretation-related matters.

5. Information technology.

6. Organization of work.

7. Other business.

8. Adoption of the report.

Annotations

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

2. Calendar of conferences and meetings

(a) Intersessional departures for 2004 and related matters

A compilation of such matters will be provided for inclusion in the report of the Committee on Conferences.

(b) Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2005

A draft revised calendar for 2005 will be submitted by the Secretariat to the Committee on Conferences at its substantive session of 2004.

The Committee will submit the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2005 to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

(c) Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

(i) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs, and consultations with and/or letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

The Committee on Conferences has studied annually a series of reports showing the meeting statistics of a number of United Nations organs in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, including analyses of trends and figures on the utilization of conference-servicing resources by those organs.

The Secretariat will report on the matter.

At its substantive session of 2003, the Committee requested its Chairperson to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure (80 per cent) of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.

In section II.A, paragraph 2, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to consult with those bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources of the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources, and urged the secretariats and bureaux of bodies that underutilized their conference-servicing resources to work more closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the Secretariat and to consider changes to their programme of work, as appropriate, including adjustments based on previous patterns for recurring agenda items, with a view to making improvements in their underutilization factors.

The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences will present an oral report on the foregoing request.

(ii) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

In section II.A, paragraphs 10 to 12, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly noted the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for such meetings were met. It also noted with concern that the rate of provision of interpretation services to the regional and other major groupings had declined and noted with appreciation that 100 per cent of requests by regional and other major groupings for conference facilities had been met, according to the current methodology for recording statistics.

In section II.A, paragraph 15, the General Assembly noted that the Secretary-General had submitted his report (A/58/397) pursuant to section II.A, paragraph 14, of its resolution 57/283 B, in which it had reaffirmed its decision to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2004-2005 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice.

The Secretariat will report on the matter.

(iii) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

In section II.A, paragraphs 3 to 6, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly welcomed the efforts being made to improve utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), as set out in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/809), and reaffirmed that all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies should take place in Nairobi, except as otherwise authorized by the Assembly or the Committee on Conferences acting on its behalf. It reiterated its encouragement to the Secretary-General to continue to intensify the efforts being made by UNON to attract more meetings to its facilities and strongly discouraged any invitation to host meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for UNON and other United Nations centres with a low utilization level.

In section II.A, paragraphs 8 and 9, the General Assembly reiterated its concern over the delay in the process of filling the remaining vacancies in the interpretation and translation services at UNON and called for the expeditious filling of the vacancies, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon, through the Committee on

Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. It also expressed regret for the difficulties, including the delay, in fully staffing the Arabic Unit in the Interpretation Section at UNON and requested the Secretary-General to take adequate measures to ensure the filling of those posts without further delay, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

The Secretariat will report on the foregoing requests.

(iv) Improving the performance of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

In section II.B, paragraphs 6 to 8 and 10 to 12, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly noted that the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management would include a comprehensive study of the integrated global management, in accordance with section II.B, paragraph 8, of its resolution 57/283 B, in consultation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and with the full participation of all duty stations in a collaborative and consultative process, with a view to reaching conclusions that are both practical and comprehensive, and requested the Secretary-General to keep the Assembly informed of the matter through the Committee on Conferences. It also requested the Secretary-General to develop further an effective measure to strengthen the responsibility and accountability system within the Secretariat, in order to ensure the timely submission of documents for processing, and to submit a comprehensive report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences.

The General Assembly noted the intention of the Secretary-General to establish a Secretariat task force, with broad participation, to conduct a comprehensive study of workload standards and performance measurement and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences. It also requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the ongoing and planned work on workload standards and performance measurement specifically developed quantitative and qualitative methods and indicators to assess productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness and to do so also for the quality of services, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The Assembly recognized that the satisfaction of Member States was a key performance indicator in conference management and services and requested the Secretary-General to continue to include a user-oriented approach towards performance management on a wider scope, to make proposals to the Assembly on the incorporation of such an approach into the performance-management methods of the Department and to incorporate the results of such an approach, as well as the results of his own internal evaluation of the Department, into future proposals for the improvement of the operation of the Department.

In section II.B, paragraph 9, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct a thorough cost-benefit study of summary records and to review the list of bodies entitled to them, in full consultation with all relevant intergovernmental bodies, with a view to assessing the need for such records, and to explore the possibility of delivering them in a more efficient and effective manner, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

The Secretariat will report on these matters.

(d) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

In paragraph 15 of its resolution 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly demanded that all subsidiary organs of the Assembly comply with the provisions of section I, paragraph 7, of its resolution 40/243, in which it had decided that no subsidiary organ of the Assembly would meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

In accordance with the procedure established by the Committee at its 1986 session and reaffirmed at its 1992 session, chairpersons of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly that wish to meet at Headquarters during the main part of the Assembly submit their requests to the Chairperson of the Committee.

3. Documentation and publication-related matters

(a) Submission, availability and distribution of documentation

In section III, paragraphs 4 to 9, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly noted the relative improvement in the timely issuance of documents for the fifty-eighth session. It noted with concern, however, that the six-week rule for issuance of documents was not fully complied with owing to, inter alia, the late submission of documents by author departments in violation of relevant rules and requested the Secretary-General to take corrective measures so as to ensure strict compliance with the six-week rule for the timely issuance of documentation in view of the impact of their late issuance on the functioning of intergovernmental and expert bodies. It also requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the rules concerning simultaneous distribution of documents in all official languages were followed with respect to the posting of parliamentary documentation on the Official Document System and on the United Nations web site, in keeping with section III, paragraph 5, of Assembly resolution 55/222. The Assembly noted with concern paragraph 61 of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/58/194 and Corr.1 and 2), reaffirmed that there should be no exceptions to the rule that documents must be distributed in all official languages and emphasized the principle that all official documents must be distributed simultaneously in all official languages before they are made available on United Nations web sites. It reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that documents were available in accordance with the six-week rule for their distribution simultaneously in the six official languages. It also reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, reflected the specificity of each language to the extent possible and that concordance in resolutions was achieved.

In section III, paragraph 10, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly urged the Secretary-General to provide Member States promptly with the outcome of the consultations referred to in this context and decided to revert to the issue at its fifty-ninth session.

(b) Compliance with page limits

In section III, paragraphs 2, 3 and 17, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly reaffirmed section B of its resolution 52/214 and emphasized that any reduction in the length of reports should affect neither the quality of presentation nor the content of the reports, re-emphasized that any reduction in the length of

documents should not adversely affect either the quality of the presentation or the substance of the documents and that the reduction should be implemented in a flexible manner with respect to the consolidated reports.

The General Assembly noted that reports not originating from the Secretariat comprised the bulk of the documents issued (see A/57/228, paras. 79-86) and requested the Secretary-General to examine ways and means to achieve compliance with the relevant guideline on page limits and to report on the matter to the Assembly through the Committee on Conferences.

The Secretariat will report on the foregoing requests. The biennial report on the number and length of documents will also be presented.

4. Translation and interpretation-related matters

In section IV, paragraphs 1 and 2, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly noted with concern the high rate of self-revision in some of the official languages, as well as the translation problems in some languages, and requested the Secretary-General, in updating the workload standards, to address the question of the appropriate level of self-revision that is consistent with quality in all official languages.

The Secretariat will report on these matters.

5. Information technology

In section V, paragraphs 1 to 3, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly emphasized that the primary goal of the introduction of new technology should be to enhance the quality, production, cost-effectiveness and efficiency of conference services, in accordance with legislative mandates. It noted the relative progress achieved thus far across duty stations in integrating information technology into management and documentation-processing systems and the particular situation of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, urged the Secretary-General to take steps to ensure that modern conference management and documentation practices, systems and technology were shared across all duty stations in an institutionalized manner and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

6. Organization of work

In section VI, paragraphs 2 and 3, of its resolution 58/250, the General Assembly recalled the need to consider biennialization and triennialization of the agenda items of the Fifth Committee, in accordance with the guidelines on the rationalization of the agenda of the Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences, proposals on the possibility of biennializing this item.

7. Other business

8. Adoption of the report